



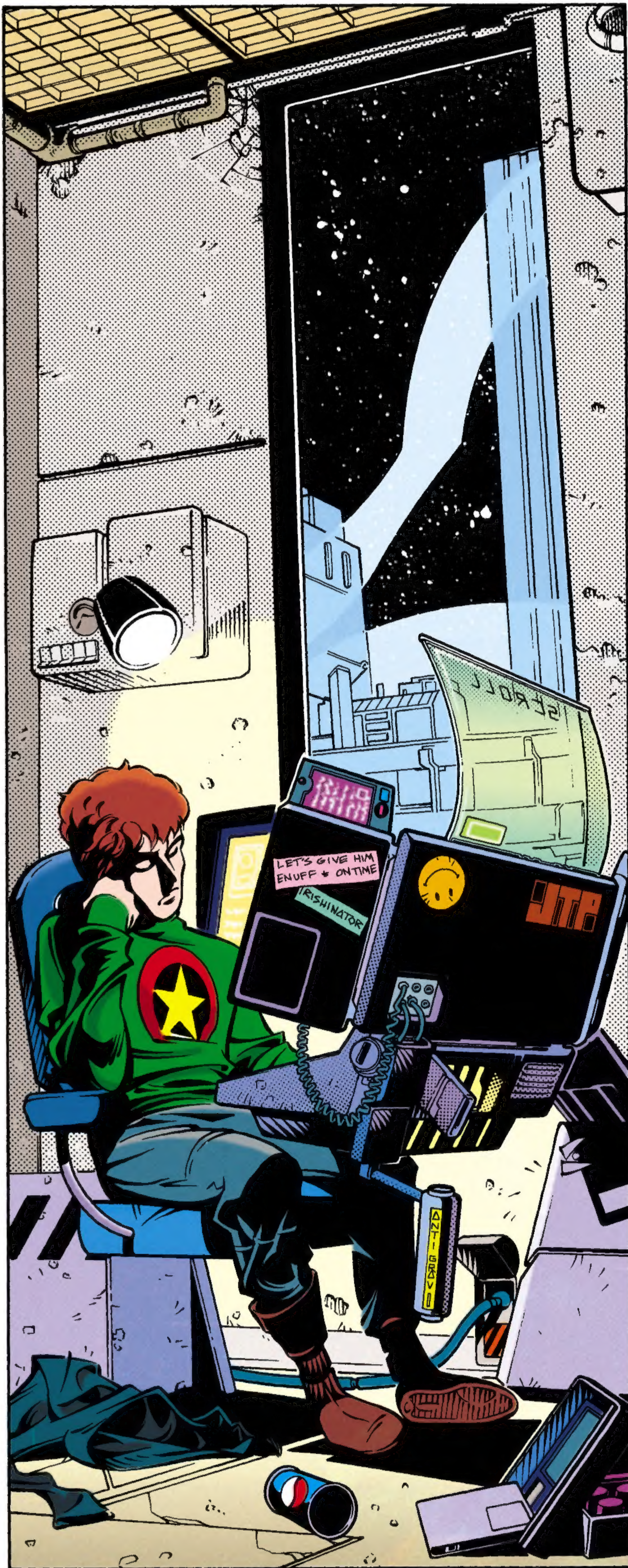
# LEGION

*OF SUPER-HEROES*

# THE END

GIFFEN  
T & M BIERBAUM  
PEARSON  
STORY





## REQUIEM

Special to the Interstellar Press  
By DEVLIN O'RYAN

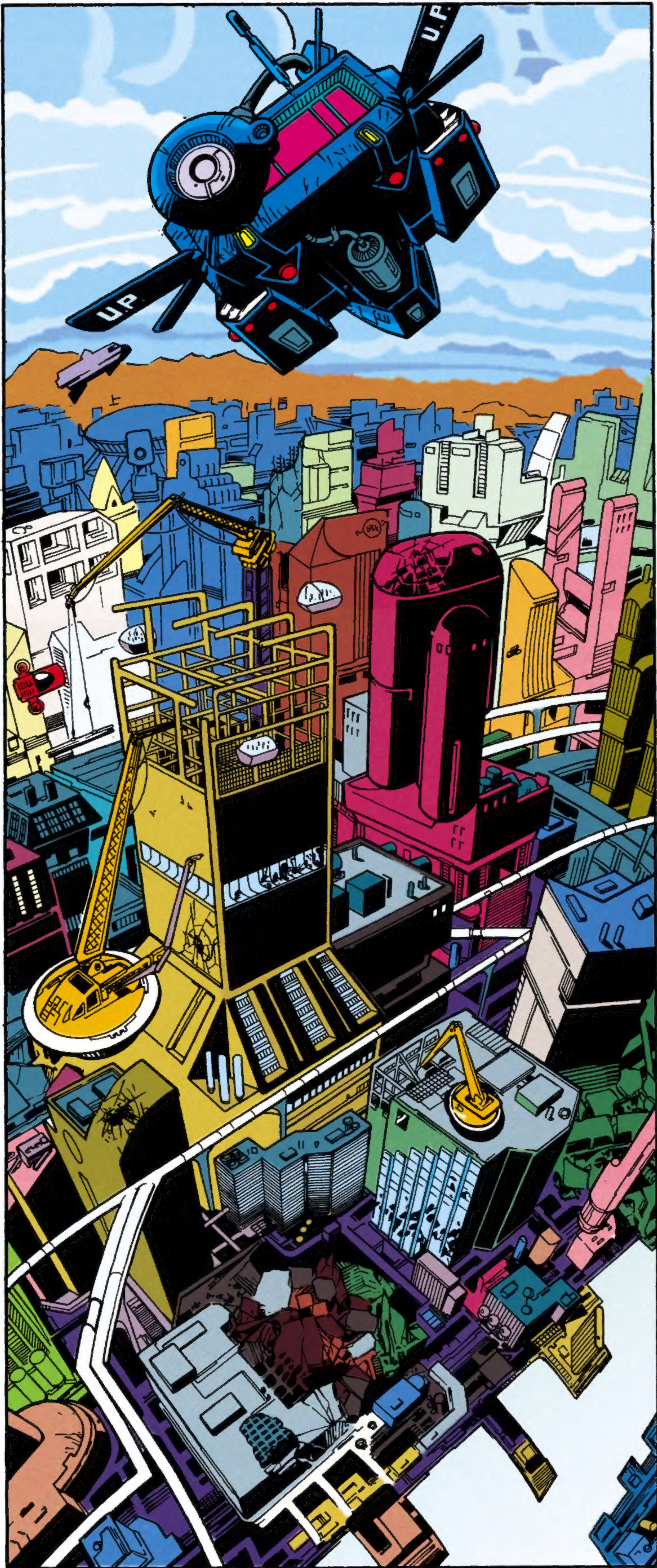
It isn't fair. After all we've gone through. After all we've triumphed over. It just isn't fair.

But then, life isn't fair, is it?

Well, no. In fact, life *is* fair, really. It sets out some clearly defined rules and challenges humankind to fashion its heaven within those rules. And in those rare moments when we realize heaven is all around us and always has been, we've got a chance. But when we decide we've got a better idea—that we can cajole, threaten, sneer, resent, whine and hate life into being something different from what it is—that's when the battle is lost.

That's when life stops being fair.





All seemed well. All seemed glorious, in fact.

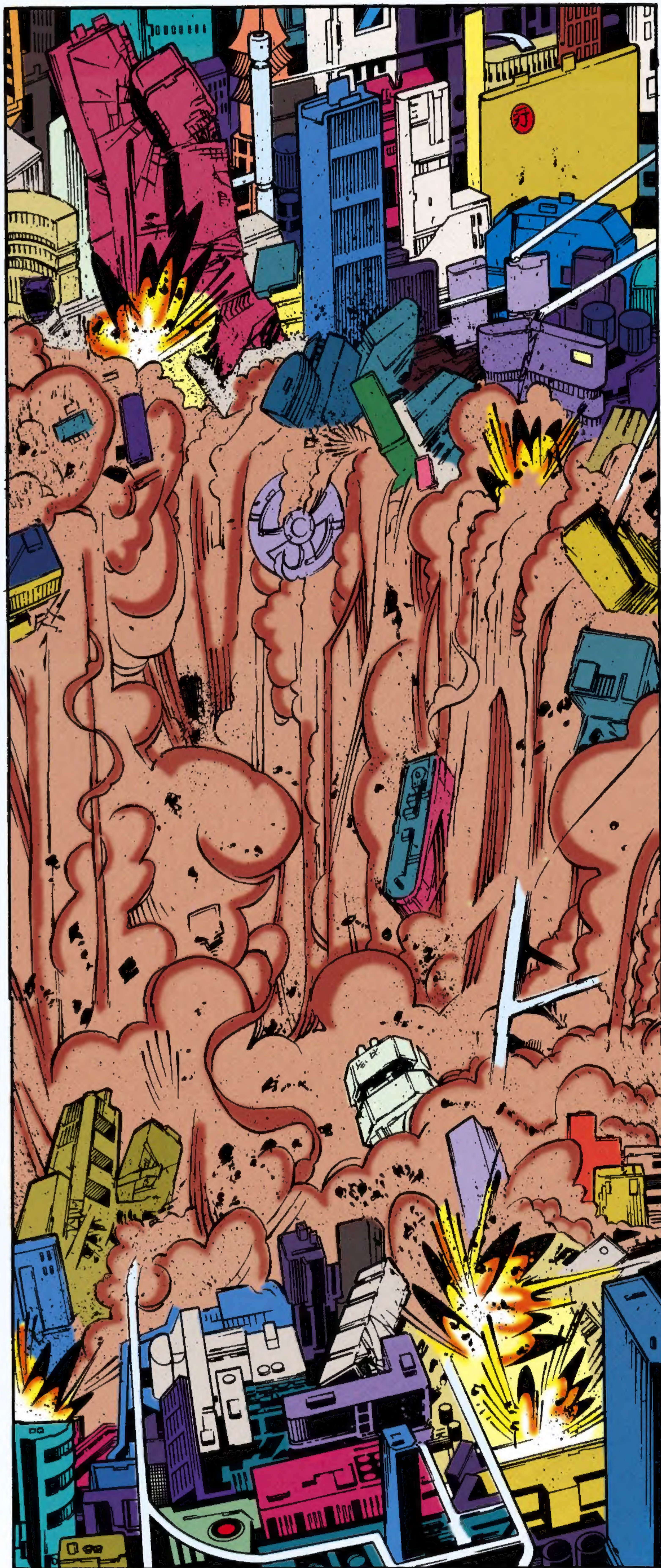
Earth had triumphed over the greatest test in its history—five years of fear, manipulation, and hatred. The destruction of the moon and devastation of Earth. One of the bloodiest wars in the history of the planet.

But the human spirit prevailed. The population of Earth beat its Dominion oppressors, beat the government that had betrayed it, beat its own hatred and paranoias, and won back this world and its destiny.

True, Earth was now in ruins. Beyond doubt it would take years of struggle—of back-breaking, soul-searing effort—to pull the world through. But the people had proven to themselves they could do it.

And, with Earth finally working in concert with the United Planets instead of against it, relief began pouring in. Food, equipment, technology, volunteers. The infectious spirit of progress, of cooperation, of triumph, began to fill the debris-choked atmosphere of this world, slowly crowding out the stink of death and hatred.



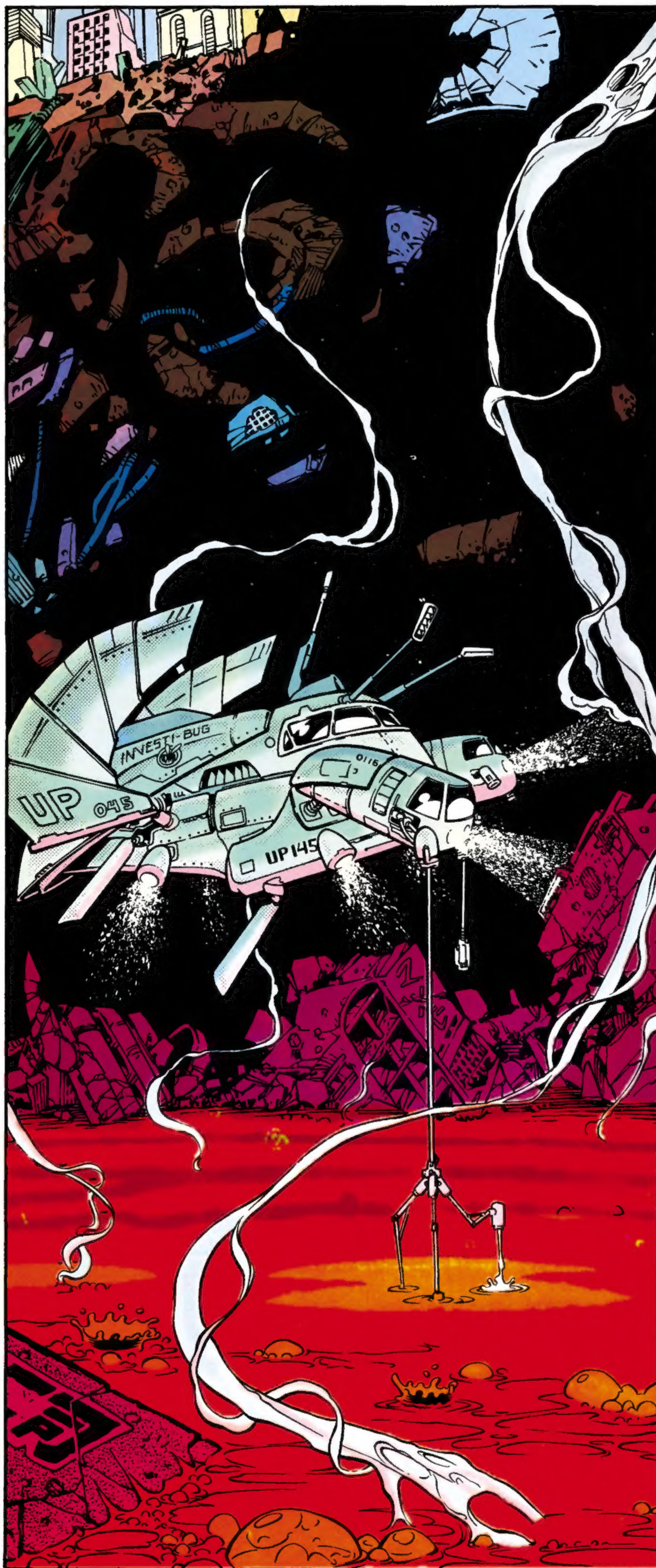


And then it hit, first in Tokyo.

A "sinkhole," they called it—a few miles from where the Tokyo Underground Chambers had gone up nine days earlier—a geological disaster that followed no known fault line or tectonic pattern.

An estimated 4000 died.





Why?

U.P. investigative teams descended on the site of the disaster and, among the gruesome remains of the destroyed neighborhood, found their answer.

Something was happening to the crust of the Earth beneath Tokyo, something these scientists had never witnessed before. They described it as a “mineralogical virus,” an impossible chain reaction that was ripping apart the ground’s very molecular bonds. Something disturbingly similar to the Dominator-spawned effect that was once used to destroy Elia’s sister planet.

When the Tokyo disaster site was eventually deemed stable, the U.P. team called in the two Brainiac 5s. Yes, two Brainiac 5s—one the adult Legion of Super-Heroes member known to the galaxy for years, and the other a youthful Brainiac 5 who emerged from the Dominators’ underground chambers in April, along with an entire “Batch SW6” teen version of the Legionnaires. Two Brainiacs—each as exasperating, unfathomable, and brilliant as the other.

These two geniuses immediately recognized the Tokyo phenomenon as the same effect they’d been studying with considerable alarm at the site of the Metropolis Chamber explosion—a runaway chain reaction apparently triggered by the destruction of all the underground chambers May 15.

A complete investigation was launched with the utmost urgency.





On May 26, the two Brainiac 5s reported their findings to the Earthgov President and the media.

The ancient underground chambers, it turned out, had been rebuilt in the 24th century to help Earth accommodate and circumvent the waste-disposal dictates of the era. Forced by its colony worlds to cease the planet's notorious space-dumping practices, Earth chose instead to bury its waste.

In that period of explosive technological growth, the deluge of refuse included massive amounts of a highly unstable substance known today as proton jelly, a toxic by-product of the Neo-Plasmic technology so widespread in the mid-millennium centuries. For hundreds of years, tons of this substance were buried around the globe in the chambers. Protests were dismissed and the money and commitment were never found to clean out the subterranean dumping grounds. Once Neo-Plasmic technology became outmoded, the chambers were sealed and forgotten.

Until now. Until the Dominators reactivated the chambers to house their grotesque genetic experiments. Until a renegade resistance fighter detonated the chambers' self-destruct mechanisms. Until the resulting explosions around the planet touched off a runaway chain reaction within the mountains of ancient, rotting proton jelly.

And then the worst news of all. The massive, global chain reactions had mostly spread downward, toward the planet's heart. Earth was being eaten alive at its core. In weeks, maybe days, Earth would die.





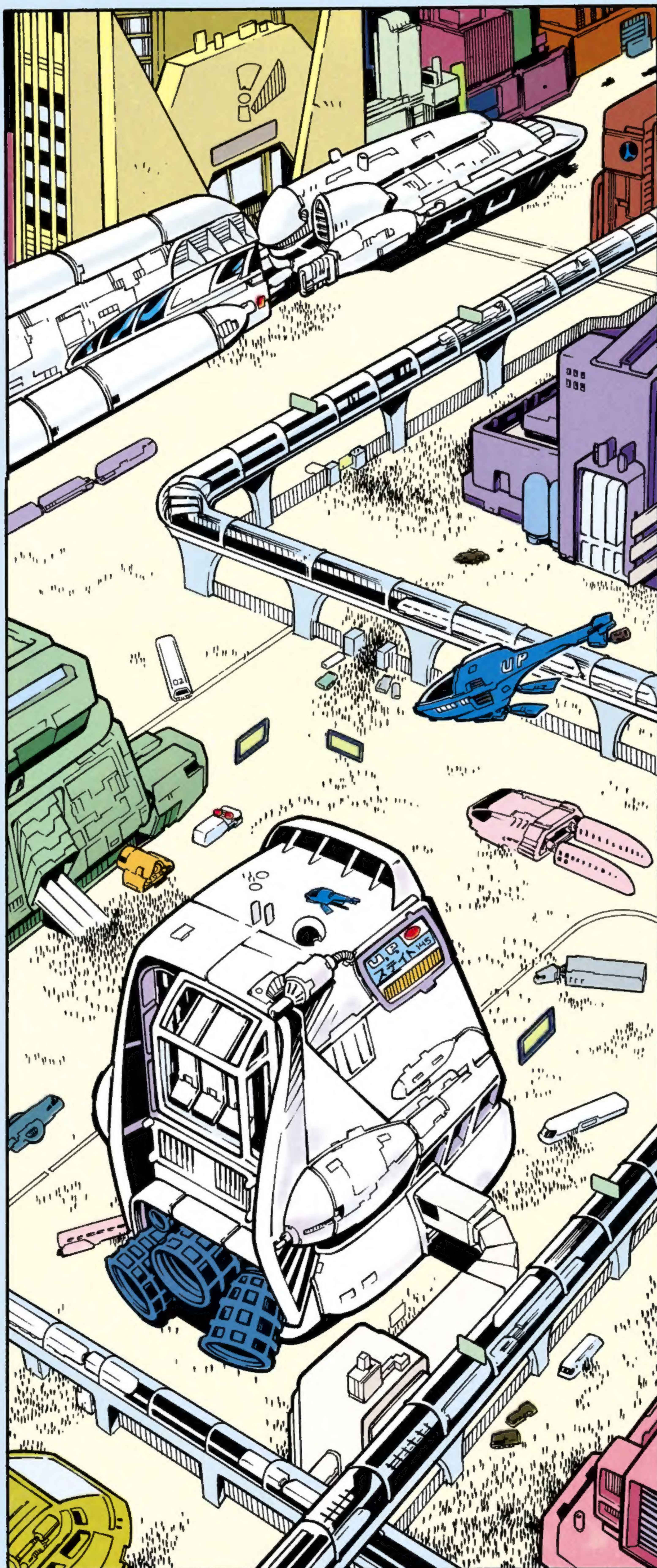
There was a period of denial. How could this be true? How could we have come so far only to be blindsided by something as out-of-the-blue as this?

But the findings were double-checked and triple-checked. Radical remedies were explored. Nothing mattered. Nothing changed.

Earth wouldn't survive. Eons of short-sightedness, fear, greed, and neglect could not be undone. The centuries of deluded thinking—that we could somehow circumvent the rules and limitations of this planet, somehow outthink and outmaneuver the very world that gave birth to humankind—could not be overcome.

It was left to Jacques Foccart, the Legion's former Invisible Kid and the appointive president of Earth, to determine a plan of action.





A mass evacuation was organized. Every available ship from Earthgov, the United Planets, and all other nearby worlds was sent to shuttle off as many people as was possible. The venerable Legion of Super-Heroes arrived in full force to join their youthful counterparts of the SW6 batch in an urgent round-the-clock effort.

But there were still billions of inhabitants. No number of ships, no number of Legionnaires, could possibly evacuate everyone in time. Jacques Foccart, the quiet, unassuming, honest young man who'd never sought the power of the presidency he'd been burdened with, would now have to decide who would be saved and who would be left behind.

Priorities were set. Children, mothers and fathers, great minds, irreplaceable talents...they would leave first. Grim lotteries were held to determine the remaining priorities.

Volunteers were sought for the last shifts—evacuation efforts would continue until the last possible moment but there was almost no chance these last shifts would ever make it off the planet.

Millions volunteered to stay behind—to await a miracle or die with their world.

The evacuation workers pushed on, an unrelenting sense of urgency to their efforts. And yet, somehow, a haunting calm settled over the fevered activities. Incidents of panic, violence, and hatred were surprisingly isolated. Humankind's final days on this planet were among its finest.





Wave after wave of evacuation ships came and went, shuttling hundreds, thousands, millions of humans beyond the solar system to safety. But the terrible truth could be denied no longer. Cataclysmic disturbances were now rocking the planet daily. Time would run out. Earth would destroy itself with billions still on it.

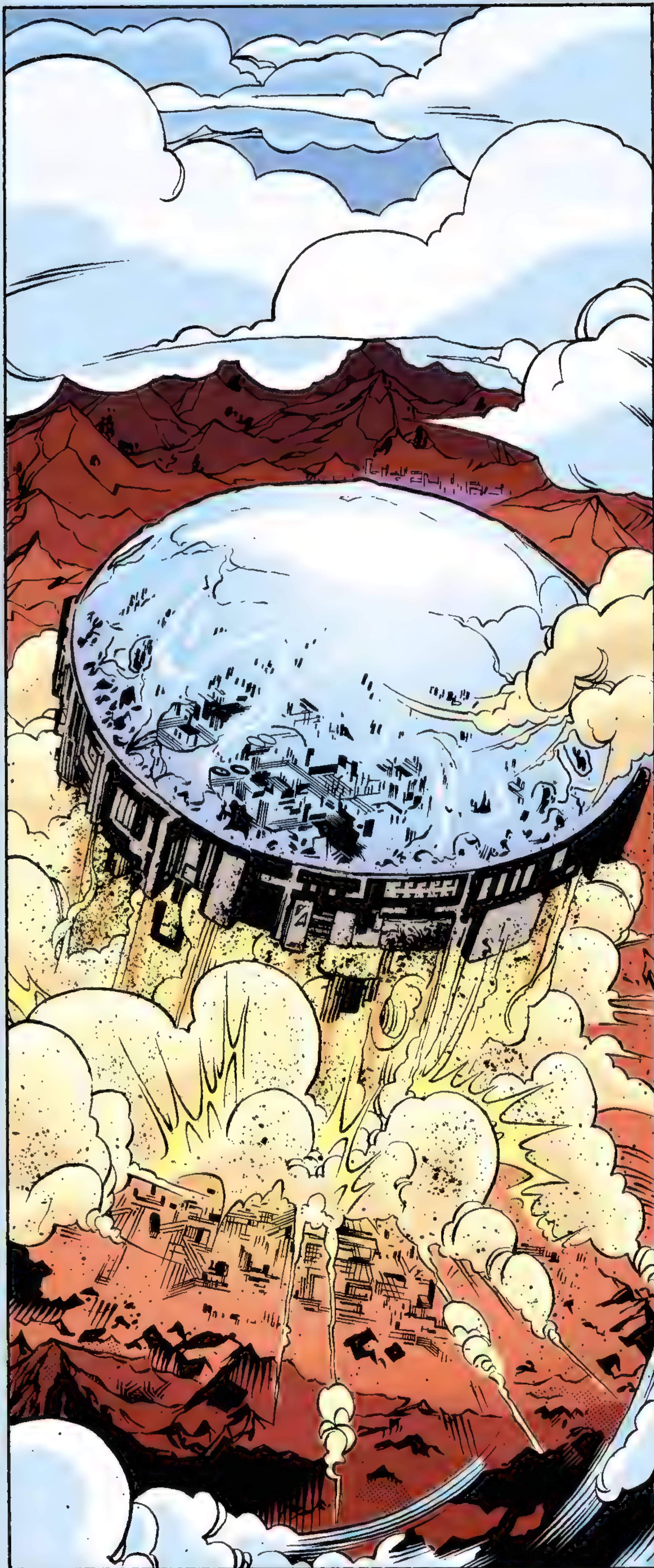




There could be no reprieve for this world, and yet many of its technological and cultural riches might still be saved. Since the great wars of the 28th century, 480 of the key districts of Earth's greatest cities had been equipped to literally rise up into the sky and beyond the atmosphere if escape from this world ever became necessary. The technology was ancient, untested, and in disrepair—in fact, only 102 of the districts had survived Moonfall and the Chamber explosions. But Foccart ordered his engineering staff to do what it could to salvage as much of the dying world as possible through this ancient, battered escape system.

The 102 districts themselves and vast regions around them were ordered completely evacuated, but many of the inhabitants refused to go and could not be driven away. So on June 3, as a powerful seismic disturbance shook the entire globe, the 102 districts' domes were ordered raised. Thousands of onlookers who had defied the evacuation orders were crushed.





Those who did not die with the raising of the domes were not destined to survive for long. The aged, immense engines beneath the cities were ignited, and slowly, uncertainly, the huge domed structures thundered skyward, toppling and incinerating everything and everyone for miles around. The reverberations were felt at every known outpost on the planet.



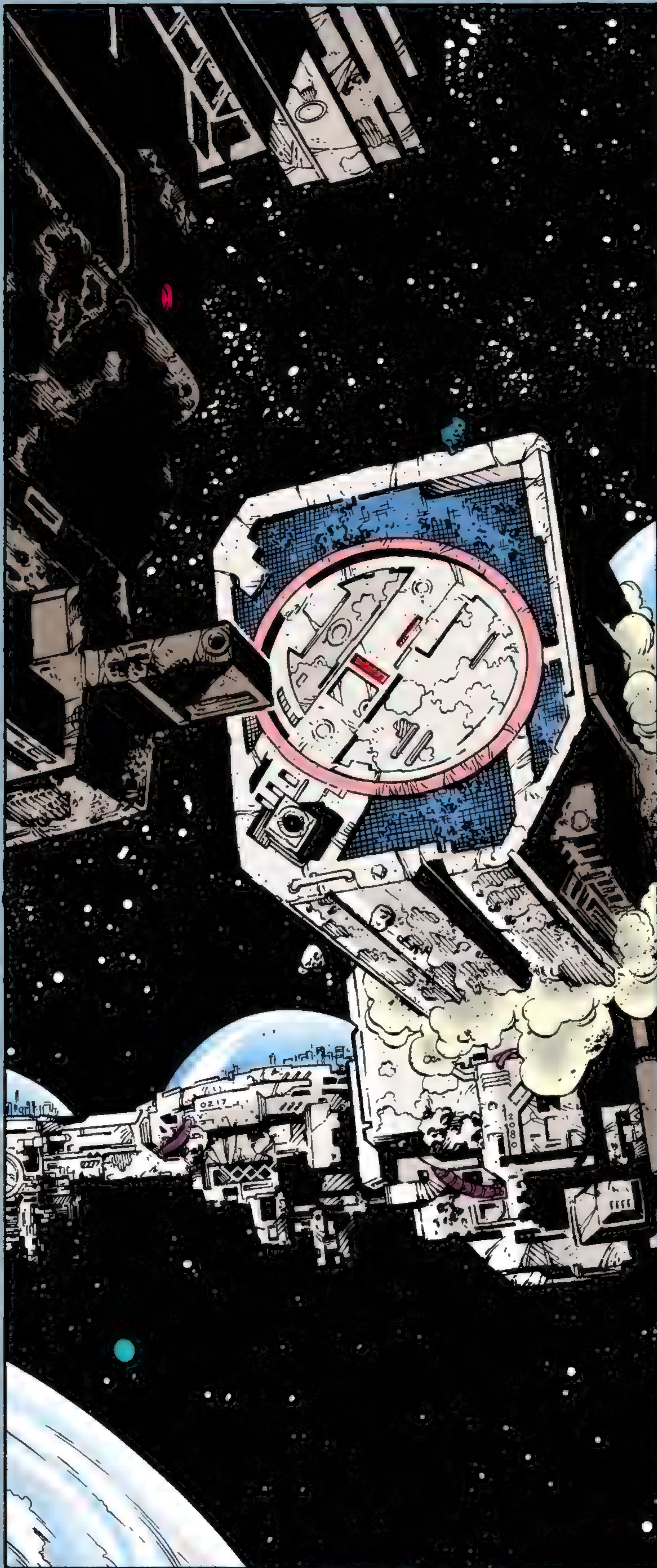


One hundred of the cities made it into space.

The domed districts of Barcelona and Tashkent did not. Massive failure of the engines was reported as the cause, and both cities were destroyed in enormous fireballs. All crewman were lost and thousands below were killed by the falling debris and the resulting fires.

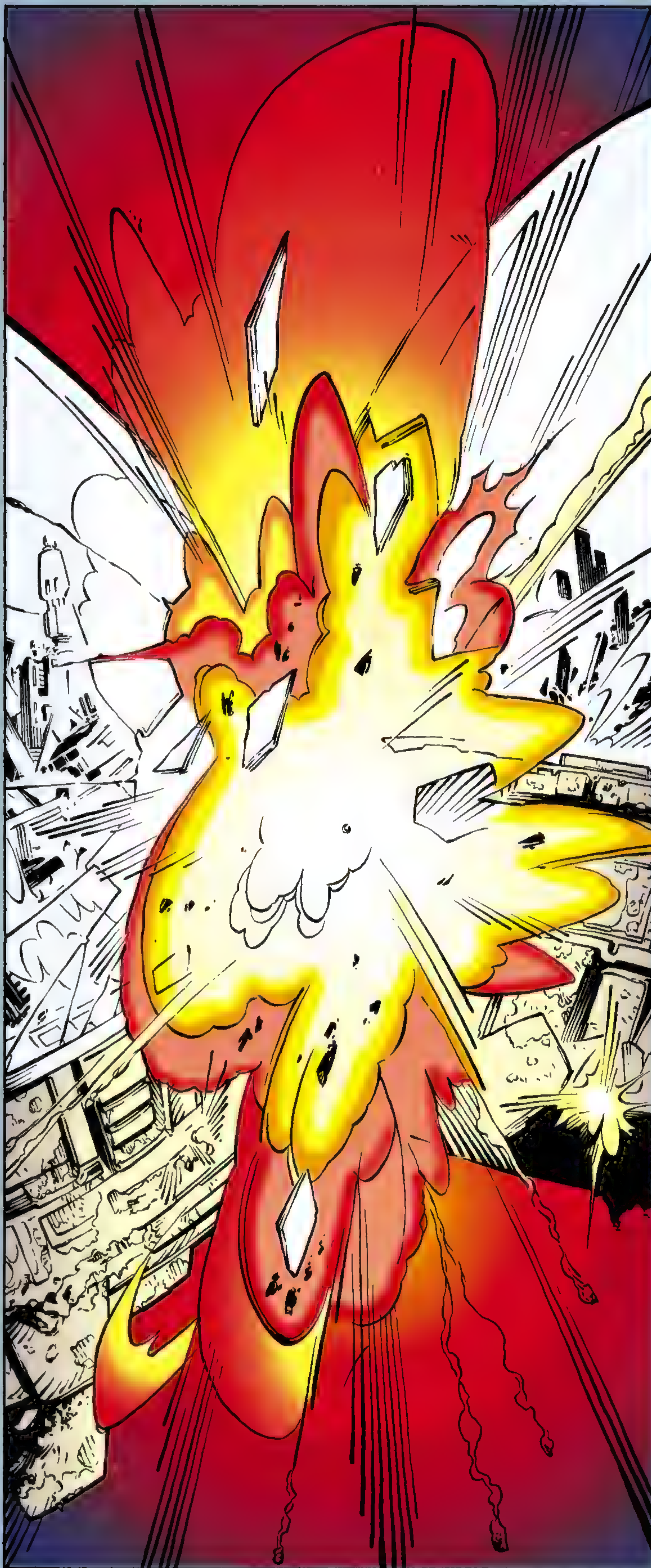
Above, crews in the surviving cities clenched their hearts, crowding the screams out of their minds, to carry on with the perilous mission at hand. The eerie flotilla of graceless behemoths maneuvered silently around the globe until all had reached a central location far above their gleaming, grey-smudged mother planet.





For hours, the mammoth craft were painstakingly maneuvered into precisely calculated positions. A creaking, rusted network of connector tunnels then shuddered to life. The tunnels slowly, arthritically reached out toward each neighboring city. Meticulous docking maneuvers were conducted again and again and the web of tunnels began to take shape.

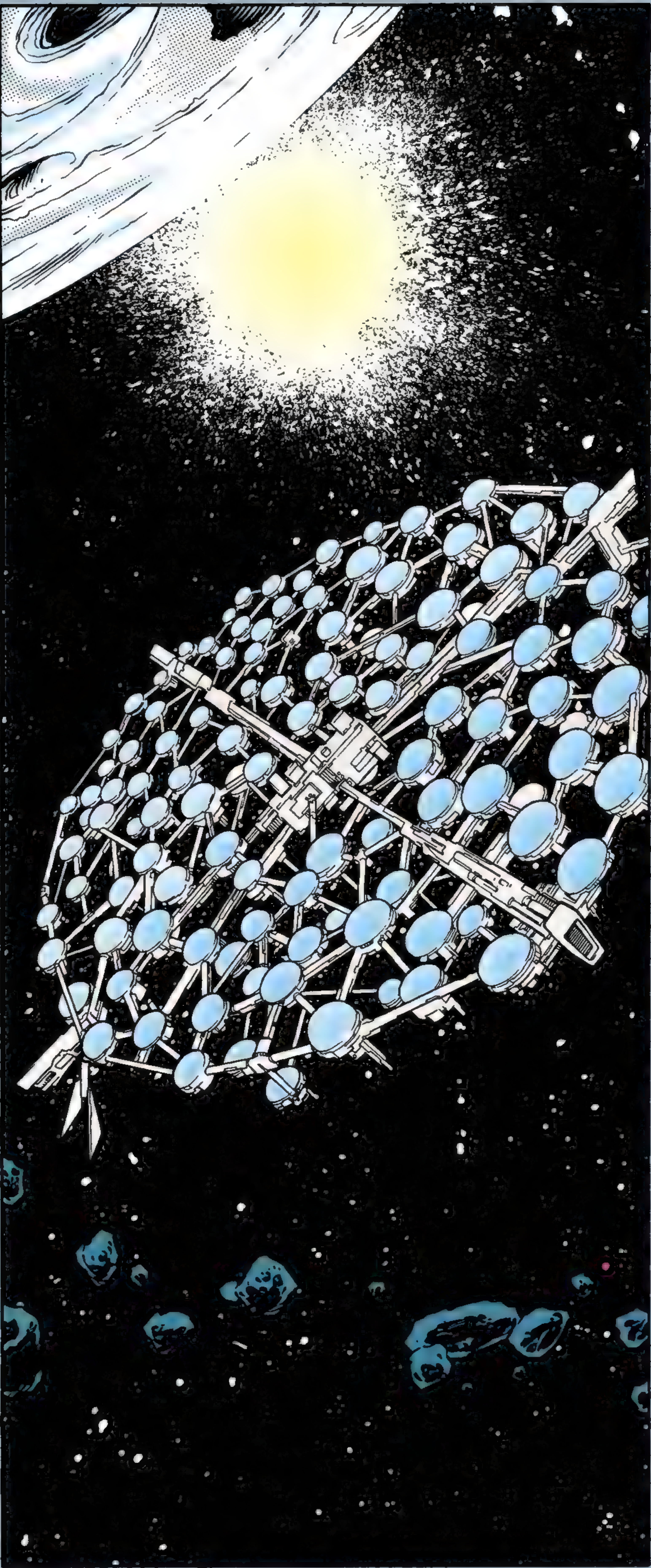




But this colossal network had been designed and constructed generations before any of its operators were born. A test of the system was impossible. Mistakes were inevitable—mistakes of immense consequence.

Five more cities—Chongqing, Dakar, Dresden, Nairobi, and Santiago—were lost.





But this excruciatingly tense dance of the behemoths was finally completed. Ninety-five cities survived. After ten hours and the loss of an estimated 200,000 lives, New Earth was born.





But there was no respite for the exhausted, emotionally drained crewmen. The most dangerous and difficult maneuver still remained. This delicate matchstick formation of cities had no chance of surviving the final death throes of the planet below, nor was there time to propel New Earth beyond the sphere of destruction. A perilous journey into the Bgztl Buffer Region was the only avenue to safety.



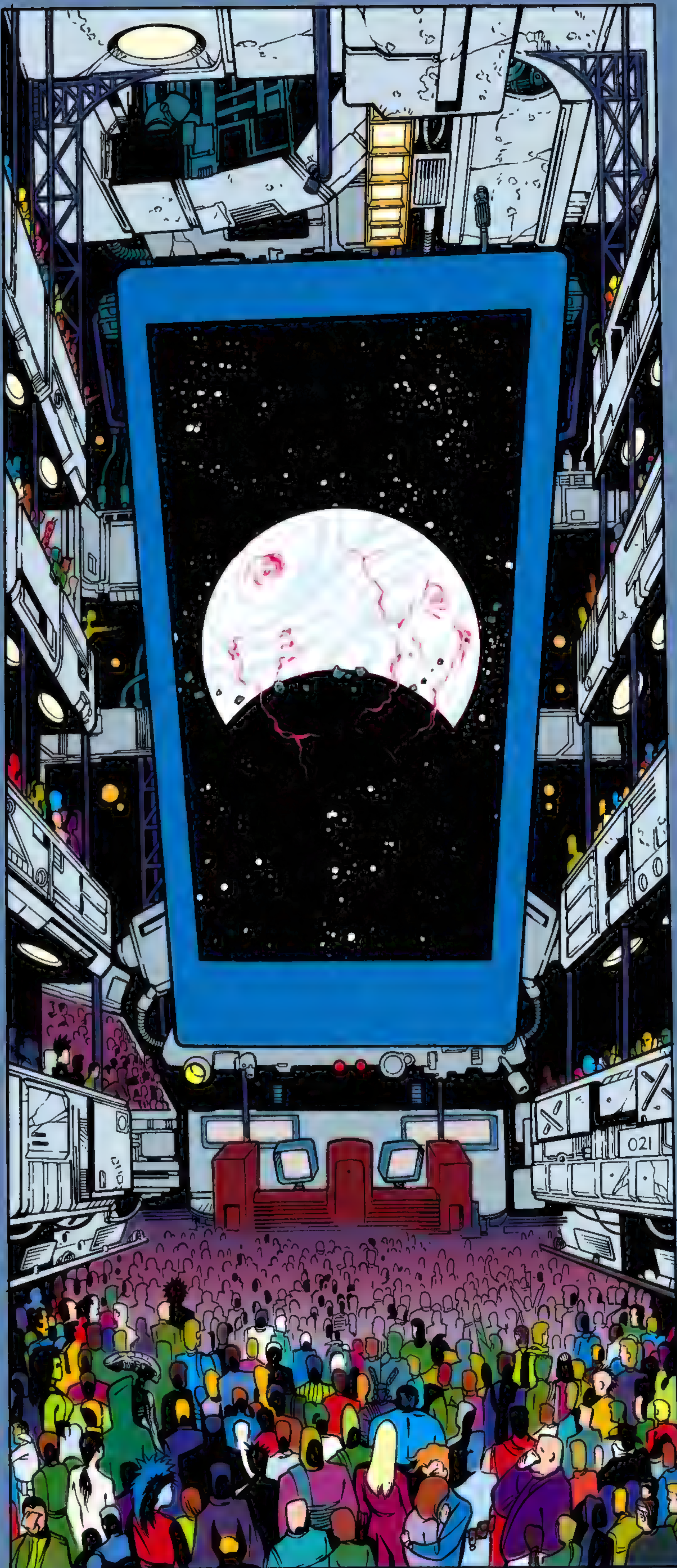


Not since the Eyth Incident of '73 had so massive a construct been successfully phased into the Buffer Region, and the engineers of New Earth had at their disposal only a tiny fraction of the power used to save Eyth. It would take a 1000-mile diameter warp to get New Earth through safely, and the engineers would get only one chance to rip the fabric of space open, hold it open, and plunge New Earth through to safety.

The ride was by all reports harrowing. The glow of the tear in space was visible from Titan. At one point the tear began to buckle and in a split second of blinding light, Seoul was obliterated. But the scrambling, frantic crew reacted, adjusted, and managed to reinforce the space-tear. They got 94 of the cities through intact.

Safe now in the buffer region, the exhausted, heroic engineers could do nothing now but wait.





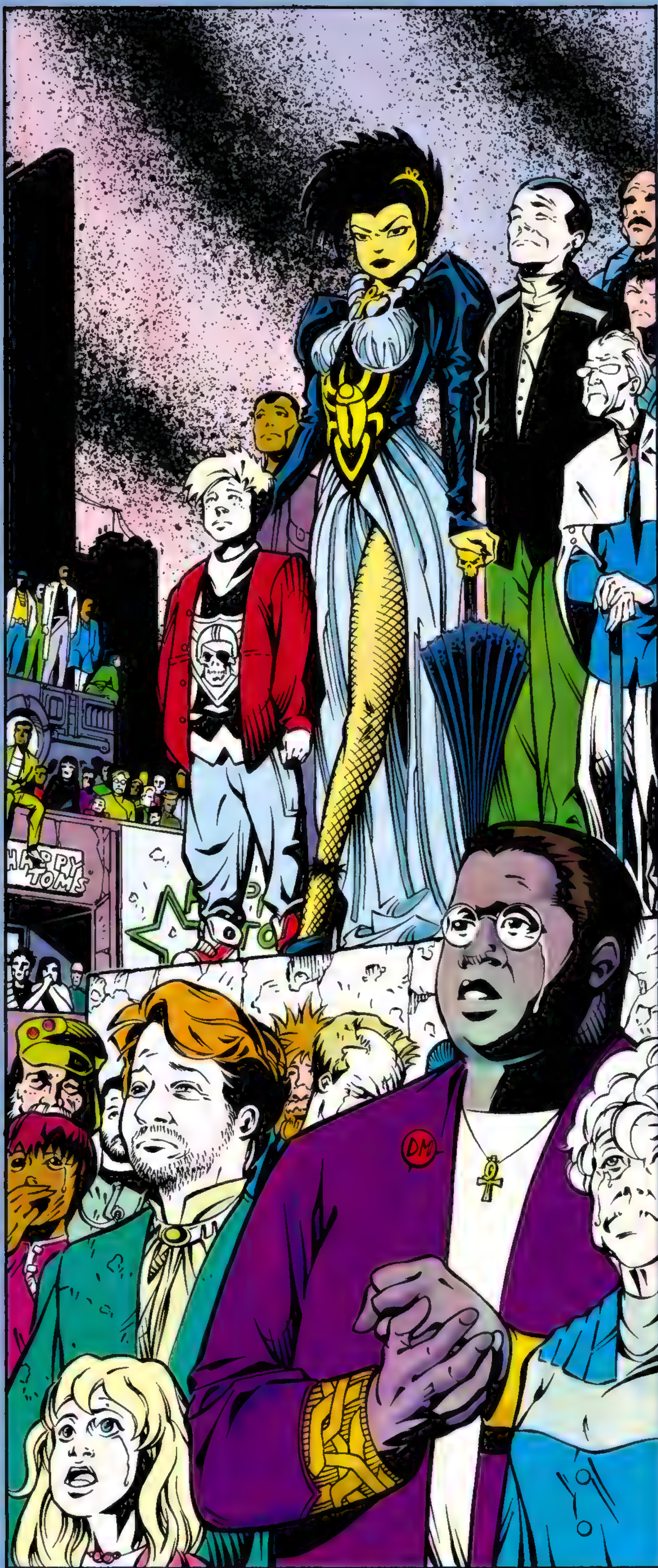
That was all anyone could do, including the billions watching from space arks and refugee camps in neighboring star systems.

At midnight Greenwich time, President Foccart addressed them, as well as those who remained on Earth. His voice faltering, Foccart ordered all evacuation efforts halted. The planet was now in a state of constant, violent geological upheaval and three arks had already been destroyed trying to navigate through the volcanic debris and the swaying, toppling towers of the helpless cities.

Foccart, a leader of unwavering character, courage and resourcefulness throughout the bloody fight against Dominion oppression—a man who had time and again stood up to hopeless, impossible odds and always triumphed—was now, before his world and the galaxy, nothing more than a sobbing child.

He'd left two billion of his brothers and sisters behind on Earth to die. Jacques Foccart had finally been beaten by the odds.





In the cities that still stood, the condemned gathered, watching gigantic screens that displayed speeches, updates, apologies, prayers.

All holos from Earth's final minutes indicate there was no panic, no hysteria, no outrage. Many of those left behind were the volunteers, those who had willingly risked this fate to allow their younger and healthier brothers and sisters to survive—and to allow those who were less strong and less at peace to live on and continue searching.

Yes, all reports are that a calm, eerie quiet embraced the doomed masses. Their fear and regret had been spent in the unrelenting anguish of earlier days and weeks. Nothing, it seemed, was left except numb disbelief, the last dying embers of hope, and, finally, tears.









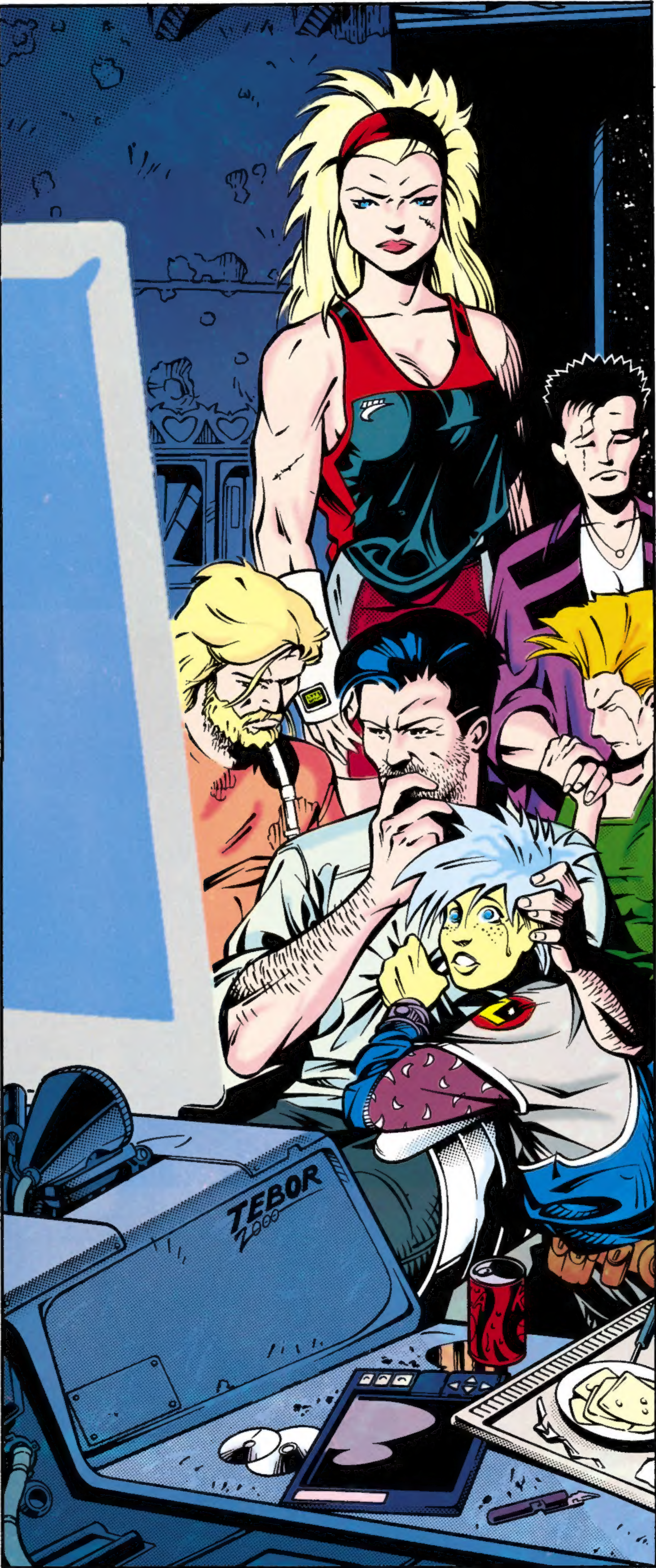
And then it was gone.  
The ghastly, excruciating  
wait was over for the two  
billion condemned.

But for those who had  
watched, those who had  
done everything they  
could to save the world  
and its people, the ordeal  
had just begun.

The images will persist in  
our minds for a lifetime—  
that final flash of destruc-  
tion; the infinity of brave  
faces awaiting slaughter;  
the crushed and burning  
bodies of Barcelona and  
Tashkent. There is no  
solace, no bright side, no  
hope. Just the indelible,  
tormenting memories  
and the regret.

No tragedy tortures its  
survivors like an avoidable  
tragedy. If only the Earth  
of the 30th century hadn't  
given in to the Dominion  
and its cynical appeals to  
our hatred and paranoia.  
If only the Earth of the  
28th century had found  
the resolve to clean up its  
ecological cancers instead  
of tending to the brutal,  
pointless wars of that era.  
If only the Earth of the  
mid-millennium had  
expected more of itself—  
enough to achieve its  
technological advances  
in symmetry with the  
mother planet, not in  
arrogant defiance of  
her rules.

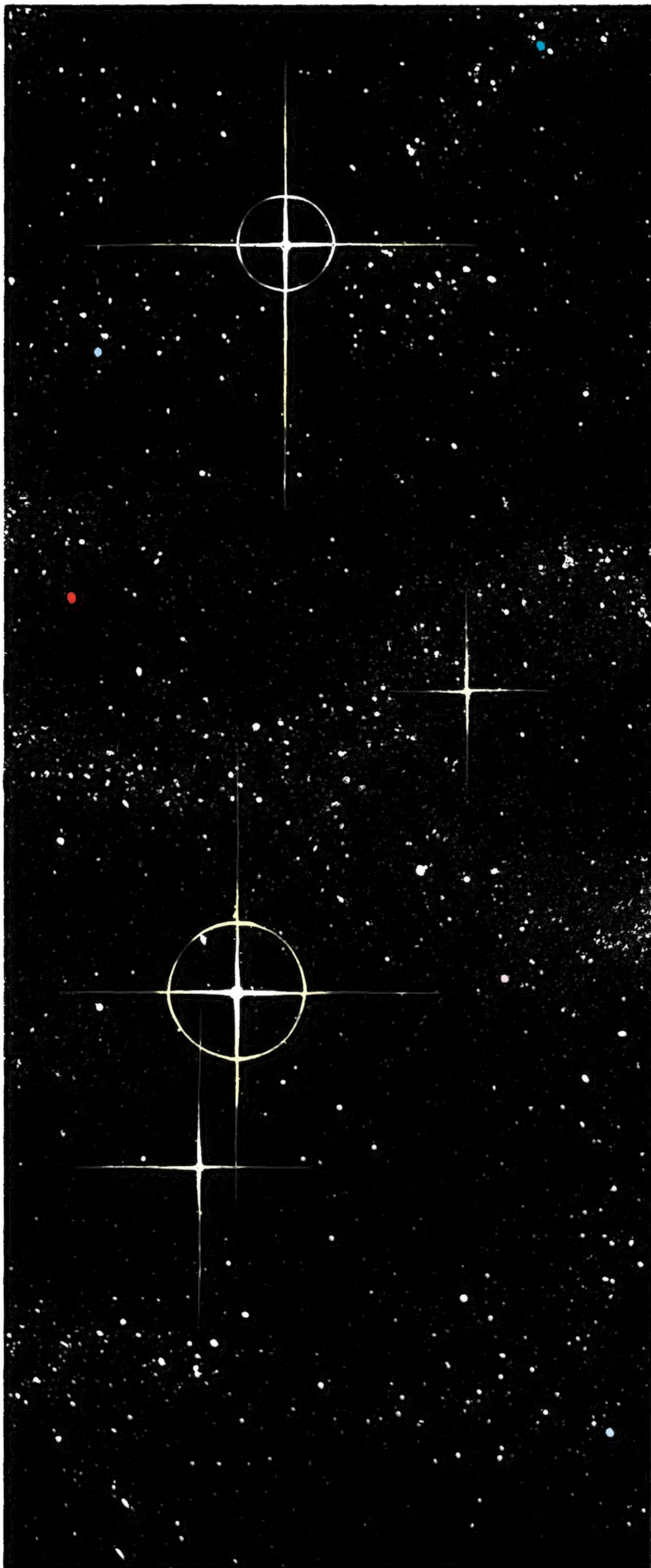




“If only...”

The ancients were right.  
Our language knows no  
sadder words.





I'm not from Earth, but I visited her many times, enough to fall in love with the beautiful land of my ancestors.

I used to get an indescribable rush out of the simplest things—just standing there watching the sun set over the rich green hills of Connacht in Ireland. Imagining generation upon generation of my forebears having similarly witnessed this same show of natural splendor. Son, father, grandfather... Daughter, mother, grandmother...

I saw them struggling in ancient times, shivering through the cold, damp Connacht night, anticipating the warmth of the sunrise they always knew would come.

And yes, the sun always returned to warm those beautiful green hills, to warm the good people of Connacht—her young sweethearts, old grandparents, good mothers and, most of all, her beautiful infants. For no matter how dank, dark and hopeless things may have seemed in the Connacht night, there would always be a tomorrow, always another chance, always a next generation... There would always be life.

Until June 4, 2009. The day...

...The day...



...The day the sun set on  
Connacht and all of  
Earth...



...for the last time...